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## Planning Commission Staff Report

**TO:** PLANNING COMMISSION

**FROM:** CATHERINE LORBEER, AICP, PRINCIPAL PLANNER  
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**THROUGH:** EVA CUTRO, AICP, PLANNING MANAGER  
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**MEETING DATE:** DECEMBER 18, 2019

**SUBJECT:** GP18-11, 2020 GENERAL PLAN: FIRST PUBLIC HEARING TO TAKE PUBLIC COMMENT ON THE PROPOSED ADOPTION OF THE TOWN OF GILBERT 2020 GENERAL PLAN. THE GENERAL PLAN INCLUDES A STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY VISION, GOALS AND DEVELOPMENT POLICIES, AS WELL AS, ALL ELEMENTS REQUIRED BY STATE LAW, INCLUDING ADDITIONAL ELEMENTS PARTICULAR TO THE NEEDS AND PURPOSES OF GILBERT.

**STRATEGIC INITIATIVE:** Prosperous Community

Individuals and families prosper in clean, safe communities with great schools, high-quality healthcare options and strong social connections. The proposed 2020 General Plan is the Community's long-range guide for development decisions over the next 20+ years.

### RECOMMENDED MOTION

No motion requested; the special meeting of the Planning Commission is a preliminary review of the process, proposed land use changes, comments received from 60-day agency review, public participation, and schedule. The 2020 General Plan (GP18-11) is scheduled for the January 22, 2020 Special Planning Commission hearing to consider a recommendation to Town Council.

## **APPLICANT**

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## **BACKGROUND/DISCUSSION**

### **History**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Description</b>
<i>August 5, 1986</i>	Town Council approved Resolution No. 730, adopting the Gilbert General Plan.
<i>November 18, 2010</i>	Town Council approved Resolution No. 3044, adopting the Gilbert General Plan 2011 and directing that the plan be submitted to the voters for ratification.
<i>May 17, 2011</i>	Voters ratified the Gilbert General Plan 2011 at the Regular Town Election.
<i>September 6, 2018</i>	Town Council approved Resolution No. 3999, adopting the public involvement plan for GP18-11, the 2020 General Plan update.
<i>November 13, 2018</i>	Town Council/Planning Commission joint meeting, which included a presentation and discussion of the 2020 General Plan update.
<i>May 1, 2019</i>	Planning Commission reviewed the summary of community feedback and plan status for the 2020 General Plan update.
<i>June 20, 2019</i>	Town Council reviewed the summary of community feedback and plan status for the 2020 General Plan update.
<i>December 18, 2019</i>	Redevelopment Commission will discuss the General Plan update process, proposed land use changes, comments received from 60-day agency review, public participation, and schedule.

### **Overview**

The new 2020 Gilbert General Plan – ***Plan for Our Future*** (Attachment 2) will lead the Town into the next decade by establishing realistic goals, policies, and implementation strategies that will keep Gilbert in the forefront of innovation and overall desirability. The General Plan contains a vision statement, along with maps, goals, policies and implementation actions that guide decisions such as how the Town grows and looks in the future; areas appropriate for residential, employment and commercial uses; areas to reserve for parks and open space; the location of roads and trails; and how preservation and conservation may be achieved.

An innovative part of the Gilbert’s ***Plan for Our Future*** involves a shift from the original General Plan document structure. The Plan is now organized around three broad interconnected themes of *Community*, *Opportunity*, and *Connectivity*. Another notable change to the plan involves combining and thus reducing the number of non-residential land use classifications from 15 to 10. After gauging community feedback during the 60-day review period, the number of residential

land use classifications remains at 8 and no combinations or changes are proposed. To recognize on-going redevelopment efforts, the Plan also identifies a new growth area for the northwest portion, which was Gilbert's first major employment area. And lastly, the Plan update addressed any prior mapping errors and remnant sliver polygons on the Land Use Map.

## **Process**

Gilbert's *Plan for Our Future* kicked-off in the summer of 2018 with a focus on updating the current General Plan to reflect shifting trends and development conditions within the Town today. Throughout the process, the Town staff has engaged the consultant services of Michael Baker International. The 2020 General Plan also defines a general path forward, addressing needs and opportunities broadly and comprehensively to write Gilbert's story for the future. This review of trends and existing conditions was the catalyst for the four planning phases that took more than 22 months to complete.

The initial phase (Recognize) focused on building upon existing plans and developing an understanding of some of the key issues, opportunities, and challenges within the community. A baseline Community Assessment Report culminated this phase. Phase two (Engage) was the cornerstone of the project and was carried out over the entire lifespan of the General Plan update. Efforts within phase two focused on utilizing multiple outreach tools to understand community preferences and assist in developing the themes, goals, policies and actions that form the foundation of the General Plan. Specific public engagement techniques included convening a 16-member General Plan Advisory Group, creating a user-friendly project website, conducting a community-wide online survey, offering a robust online mapping tool, and hosting community, youth and mobile workshops.

The General Plan Advisory Group (GPAG) was established to help advise the public process and to help shape the plan's outcomes. Advisory members represented a broad spectrum of interests from throughout the Gilbert community. The GPAG played a critical role in ensuring the plan was responsive to neighborhood conditions and the aspirations of the community by providing advice and feedback to the planning team at crucial steps. The GPAG held seven meetings and many members participated in community outreach events during the planning process.

Phase three (Enrich) involved the actual drafting of Gilbert's *Plan for Our Future*. And lastly, the Planning Commission's first public hearing marks initiation of the final phase (Achieve), which centers on addressing public review comments on the draft plan and facilitates the formal adoption process through public hearings before the Planning Commission and Town Council.

## **State Law Requirements**

Arizona State Statute (ARS §9-461.05) requires that all municipalities must prepare and adopt a comprehensive general plan for the physical development of land within its jurisdiction. Specific requirements for content or "elements" of the plan are based on the total population of a community. Based on Gilbert's current population, ARS requires the Town's General Plan to address 17 specific elements: Land Use; Circulation; Open Space; Growth Areas; Environmental Planning; Cost of Development; Water Resources; Conservation; Recreation; Public Services and Facilities; Public Buildings; Housing; Conservation, Rehabilitation and Redevelopment; Safety;

Bicycling; Energy; and Neighborhood Preservation and Revitalization. These elements are further described and addressed in Chapter 5: General Plan Elements and Policies.

ARS further requires re-adoption and voter ratification of the Town's General Plan every 10 years; thus, Gilbert's General Plan is up for re-adoption as the plan was last ratified by voters in May 2011.

### Systems Approach

An innovative part of the Gilbert 2020 General Plan update involves a shift from the original General Plan document structure into a systems approach. Traditionally, General Plans have been organized into chapters for each of the state-required elements noted above. Within these chapters or elements, corresponding goals and policies are then outlined to guide future decision making. However, this element by element approach causes chapters to be independent of one other, which creates excessive redundancies amongst identified goals and policies, and establishes no clear connection or means to create unified priorities for implementation across elements.

The 2020 General Plan recognizes that Gilbert is made up of complex, interconnected systems that cannot be siloed into independent elements. Goals that guide land use can also impact transportation, or policies that drive housing can impact economic development. Consequently, a modified approach was applied to Gilbert's *Plan for Our Future*, which organizes the plan around three broad interconnected systems or themes that convey the general ideals Gilbert is planning for over the next 20 years to reach the envisioned future.

*Community*, *Opportunity* and *Connectivity* represent the three interrelated themes that must be equally prioritized. *Community* focuses on the livability fundamentals that create Gilbert's unique and desirable character. *Opportunity* establishes a framework to ensure smart, fiscally- sustainable, environmentally conscious, and healthy growth into the future. *Connectivity* addresses the safe, convenient, equitable, and efficient movement of people and goods.

### Simplification of Non-Residential Land Use Classifications

The Land Use Map describes the long-term, physical development pattern desired for Gilbert. The map organizes the Town's land use structure and character using a number of land use classifications for housing, business, industry and other appropriate uses. Because the Land Use Map is intended to be more general in nature, as compared to zoning districts that are more regulatory and specific, Town staff explored combining similar land use classifications. For example, the five commercial land use classifications were combined into three: Neighborhood Commercial, General Commercial and Regional Commercial. As a result, the overall number of non-residential land use classifications was simplified from 15 to 10.

During the 60-day review period, the draft Land Use Map also explored simplification of some residential land use classifications. However, after gauging community feedback and concerns about potential density increases, the number of residential land use classifications remains at eight and no combinations or changes are being proposed.

Aside from the land use combinations, the update process also addressed any prior mapping errors and remnant sliver polygons on the Land Use Map that had occurred over the past 10 years.

### Northwest Growth Area

To ensure the area remains vital into the future, the 2020 General Plan identifies the northwest portion of Town as a growth area. The Northwest Growth Area is located south of the US 60 from Baseline Road to just south of Elliot Road, and extending from Arizona Avenue to Cooper Road. The Northwest Growth Area is Gilbert's most mature employment area and has the largest concentration of jobs of all the growth areas. This geographic area has experienced market changes over the years and has attracted industry leading anchor institutions and companies primarily associated with science, technology, engineering, and math related occupations in aerospace, manufacturing, and professional services industries. A focus on a unified vision, infrastructure, investment, development and quality of life will ensure the area remains a vibrant hub for employment, redevelopment and innovation within the community.

### How will the General Plan be used?

*Plan for Our Future* serves as the policy foundation for all other planning and long-range decision making in Gilbert. From economic development strategies to capital improvements, the Plan is meant to be used for a variety of reasons and by multiple users. For instance, the Town Council will use this Plan to define policy and to make funding and budgetary decisions. The Plan will also be used by Town staff to guide building and development, and to make recommendations on projects and programs. The General Plan may also be used by residents, neighborhood groups, businesses, and other stakeholders to understand the Town's long-range plans and proposals for different geographic areas within Gilbert.

## **60-DAY REVIEW COMMENTS**

From October 7, 2019 to December 6, 2019, the Town conducted the state mandated 60-Day review period. During this time, the draft 2020 General Plan was made available to the public, Town elected and appointed leaders, GPAG, along with over 63 public agencies and individual interagency partners for final review and comment. In accordance with Arizona Revised Statutes: §9-461.06(D), all adjacent communities or other affected agencies are entitled to an opportunity to provide comment during a mandatory 60-day review period. Upon conclusion of this review period, all comments were compiled and considered for incorporation into the final document.

Participants offered input individually through in person comment cards or online comment forms. A total of 36 in person and online comments were received from the general public. A general synopsis of public feedback received expressed support for the plan, consideration of air quality and energy sustainability, and identified concern for increased housing density and traffic congestion. A total of 10 agencies provided formal comment, which consisted of general support for the plan along with detailed comments and recommended edits to various goals, policies and maps to enhance alignment with individual agency objectives and/or directives. Please refer to Attachment 3. All engagement feedback information was considered by the project team and GPAG to inform the process of preparing the public hearing draft of the 2020 Gilbert General Plan.

## **PUBLIC NOTIFICATION AND INPUT**

A notice of public hearing was published in a newspaper of general circulation in the Town and an official notice was posted in all the required public places within the Town per the requirements of the Land Development Code Article 5.205.

During the 60-day review period, the Town engaged in a widespread public outreach campaign to inform community members about the availability of the draft 2020 General Plan and to solicit feedback. Outreach efforts included conducting a community workshop, along with facilitating a series of mobile workshops held in association with larger Town events such as the Desert Sky Park grand opening. Town staff also presented to the school district boards and at various community facilities such as the senior center. Additional outreach efforts included providing detailed information and materials on the 2020 Gilbert General Plan website, posting videos under the “Manager’s Update” section on the Town’s website, and publishing a press release. Individuals expressing interest in the General Plan update were emailed and provided a link to the project website and draft document. Staff also engaged residents on the Town’s social media accounts including Twitter, Facebook and Nextdoor by responding to questions and encouraging public participation.

## **SCHOOL DISTRICT**

During the 60-day review period, Town staff presented to the all three school district boards about the update and to solicit feedback. A representative from the Higley School District also participated on the GPAG.

## **STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

No motion requested; the special meeting of the Planning Commission is a preliminary review of the process, proposed land use changes, comments received from 60-day agency review, public participation, and schedule. The 2020 General Plan (GP18-11) is scheduled for the January 22, 2020 Special Planning Commission hearing to consider a recommendation to Town Council.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Lorbeer, AICP  
Principal Planner / Zoning Administrator

## **Attachments and Enclosures:**

- 1) Notice of Public Hearing
- 2) Draft 2020 Gilbert General Plan – *Plan for Our Future*
- 3) 60-Day Agency Review Comments